

Sri Manah-siksa

Srila Bhakti Vinoda Thakur

Verse 1

Translation

O MY UNCOMPREHENDING INNER SELF, my dear brother mind, I humbly prostrate myself before you. Taking hold of your feet, I beseech you, please give up all pride and surrender fully to Sri Guru, to the spiritual abode of Vraja-dhama, to the residents of Vraja, to all the Vaisnava devotees of the Lord, to the sattvika-brahmanas, to the holy name of the Supreme Lord, and to the ever-fresh and youthful Divine Couple of blossoming beauty, Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna, and in this way quickly develop sublime attachment to Them.

Sri Bhajana-darpana

Falling humbly at the lotus feet of Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami, who is respected throughout the universe as a spiritual master, I commence this Sri Bhajana-darpana, which is a commentary on his book Sri Manah-siksa. Srila Raghunatha severed all family attachments and took complete shelter at the lotus feet of Lord Gauranga, who advented in Kali-yuga as the most munificent incarnation of the Supreme Godhead. On Lord Gauranga's request, Srila Svarupa Damodara Gosvami revealed to Raghunatha dasa Gosvami all the recondite conclusions of scriptures on the science of unalloyed devotion. These twelve verses of Sri Manah-siksa are therefore the source of life and inspiration to the entire Gaudiya Vaisnava community, for by instructing his own mind, Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami teaches all Gaudiya Vaisnavas.

This is the essential spiritual question: What is the living entity's prime duty when he finally develops heartfelt faith in the topics of Krsna consciousness, a faith which itself is the result of so much piety? Sri Manah-siksa answers this important question, and in Sri Bhajana-darpana, every point in these verses is explained in detail, and all the inner esoteric meanings revealed.

Two types of spiritual masters

There are two types of spiritual masters: the diksa-guru and the siksa-guru. The unalloyed devotee who completely destroys all anarthas, or unwanted desires in one's heart, by bestowing transcendental knowledge of one's sacred relationship with Lord Sri Krsna, is known as the diksa-guru. And the pure devotee who instructs and guides the disciple in the confidential service of Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna is the siksa-guru. Both are manifestations of Krsna and are equal in all respects, and they both should always be held in the highest esteem as objects of worship and loving service,

Vrndavana-dhama and the devotees

Sri Vraja-dhama is the holy abode of Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna's transcendental loving pastimes. Gokula, Vrndavana, Nandagrama, Govardhana, Yavata, Radha-kunda and Syamakunda are some of the many different sites within Vraja where they perform Their lila.

Sri Vraja-basi-jana are the pure devotees who actually reside in the sacred dhama and render loving service to Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna. They do not aspire even for Valkuntha, what to speak of desiring any sense enjoyment or liberation. In order to render loving service to the Divine Couple they reside in Vraja in person or by meditation, and they are therefore considered to be the very highest level of devotees, or most advanced uttama-adhikaris.

Sujanas are devotees who belong to the four Vaisnava Sampradayas. Many of them reside in Vraja but not in their spiritual forms. This means that they are present in Vraja but do not worship Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna in the mood of the Vrndavana pastimes. Instead, they worship Radha-Krsna in the mood of Rukmini-Dvarakadisa in Dvaraka, or as Laksmi-Narayana with feelings of awe and reverence. As intermediate devotees they are called madhyama-adhikaris.

Brahmanas strictly following the rule of varnasrama-dharma, teaching the science of Vaisnavism, are known as bhusuragana. They are neophyte devotees,

or kanisiha-adhikaris.

Initiation and mantras

The mantra which the disciple receives directly from his spiritual master is known as sva-mantra, one's original or principal mantra. In order to ensure spiritual success, it should be chanted diligently. Hari, Radha-kanta, Krsna, Govinda, etc., are the Supreme Lord's principal names. When He is called Patitapavana, paramatma, brahman, etc., these names are known as His indirect, or secondary names. One should take shelter of the principal names of the lord, particularly the maha-mantra:

hare krsna, hare krsna, krsna krsna, hare hare hare rama, hare rama, rama rama,
hare hare

Surrender without pretense

Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami defines surrender as the external indication of one's internal cultivation of unalloyed love and attraction for the lotus feet of Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna. Illusion, deceit, pretense, ignorance, deviousness, and committing offenses are different aspects of pride. For in practicing bhakti, or devotional service, cultivation of desires and aspirations other than those that augment one's pure love is considered pretense. When there is a predominance of fruitive activities, empirical knowledge, or practice of yoga in the execution of one's bhakti, ignorance increases and causes one to lose whatever true knowledge he has gained. In other words, when service to Radha and Krsna is contaminated by any negative or unfavorable mood or practice, it becomes covered by maya, or illusion. These are all obstacles which must be removed from the path of pure bhakti, until one is freed from the false pride born of varnasrama-dharma, material accomplishments, and forgetfulness of one's original spiritual identity.

Self-realization is pure attachment

Therefore self-realization, or true identification with one's spiritual nature, is the purest form of attachment. The living entity's original and thus constitutional position is as an eternal servant of Sri Krsna. It is only by the force of illusion and material conditioning that the soul develops attachment for transient material things. Because Lord Krsna is the Soul of souls, or Super-soul, only on the platform of pure devotion to the Supreme lord can one be situated in and attached to one's real life. As much as one's attachment is concentrated in Krsna consciousness, to that degree it is known as sublime attachment.

The point is that one must anxiously strive to develop this kind of attachment to Lord Krsna and His devotional service, never becoming complacent and thinking, 'If luck favours me, it will automatically happen.' As one performs the practices of bhakti yoga in the association of pure devotees, one's inner spiritual strength gradually manifests itself more and more, and the results of fruitive activities begin to dissipate. So by the practice of sadhana-bhakti, without doubt one will attract the mercy of the pure devotees and the Supreme lord Krsna Himself.

Association leads to faith and Initiation

The essential spiritual advice in this purport is this: as long as the results of fruitive activities are not diminished by the purifying association of saintly persons, sraddha or faith, will not occur. Without proper faith one remains unqualified to hear transcendental topics, and thus assimilate spiritual instructions. However, if faith dawns in one's heart, his very first step is to accept initiation from a bona fide diksa-guru, to receive a mantra for constant worship, and to render loving devotional service to the Divine Couple Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna. One should chant this mantra and worship both the initiating and instructing spiritual masters with great attachment, never thinking that the guru is merely a great sage--rather, that he is one's most intimate and well-wishing friend.

Instructions to the devotee

The three kinds of Vaisnava devotee — kanistha, madhyama, and uttama — should be offered respect according to their stations and served affectionately to their satisfaction. The aspiring devotee should cultivate true attachment to the holy name and to the mantra bestowed on him through the diksa-guru by the Soul of his own soul, and should offer himself in full surrender to Them.

Verse 2

Translation

O my dear mind, please do not perform the religious activities described in the Vedas, or the sinful activities also designated in the scriptures. The ultimate conclusion of the Vedic literatures is that the Divine Couple Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna is the supreme object of worship, and that loving service to Them is the most relishable experience of all. Therefore, O mind, engage yourself fully in serving Them with love and devotion. Always meditate on Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the son of Mother Saci, understanding Him to be absolutely non-different from Sri Krsna, the son of Maharaja Nanda. O mind, meditate as well on Sri Guru, who is the dearmost devotee of Lord Mukunda, Krsna.

Sri Bhajana-darpana

The advice which Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami gave us in the first verse was to extirpate all our pride, but naturally this poses some problems. How can a living entity support and maintain himself if he engages full-time in devotional service to Lord Krsna? How can one lead a normal active life if he gives up the prescribed duties that regulate religious and occupational activities as well as the sins committed in the course of everyday life? A second problem arises: if one directs his devotion singlemindedly to Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna, how will he be able to behold Sri Krsna Caitanya? What is his position? The third question is this: in what devotional mood should one meditate on the spiritual master?

Pious and Impious activities

The Vedas state that a person's every deed comes under one of the only two categories: pious or impious. If he is to restrict himself from all activities, how can he possibly survive even for a moment? But please note that Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami is not suggesting that one cease all physical activities, impious or otherwise. There are two classes of living entities in the world, the self-realized and the ignorant. The ignorant cannot work without rules and regulations, for when they act independently of scriptural ordinance their activities turn inauspicious and immoral. The Vedas have therefore categorized all man's activities into pious and impious for their sake. Those who possess knowledge of the soul and the soul's true spiritual identity are self-realized, and therefore scriptural rules and regulations are not meant for them. Scripture instructs them to embrace the path of self-realization, which is the process of surrendering to Lord Sri Krsna—in other words, to cultivate unalloyed loving devotion to the Personality of Godhead.

A pious and faithful person belongs to this latter category, and thus Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami advises him not to become entangled in either pious or impious activities, but to engage in unlimited devotional service to the Divine Couple, Radha and Krsna. All the necessary activities in a sadhaka's, or a practicing devotee's, life must be dovetailed into direct service to the Supreme Divine Couple.

The Lord Is the supreme enjoyer

When the sadhaka is thus strictly practicing varnasrama dharma he naturally performs all his activities as service to the Supreme Lord. Householder devotees especially should establish Deity worship in their homes, thus making the Deity the center of all their activities and worship. The grhastha earns money, maintains his family property, protects his assets, builds a home, etc., everything being executed in the mood of service to the Lord. He never tries to take the position that he is the only enjoyer of the results of his actions. He even performs the sraddha ritual as mentioned in the Hari-bhakti-vilasa, but only as service to the Lord. Thus, when his devotion matures and he becomes ready to graduate

from the strict regulations of varnasrama-dharma, he can very easily live in Vraja-dhama and engage wholly in serving the Divine Couple in the spiritual mellows appropriate to his spiritual identity. Even those who continue to live outside Vraja may reside there through meditation.

Devotees must worship Guru-Gauranga

One should always meditate on Lord Gauranga, knowing Him to be non-different in every way from Sri Krsna, and on Sri Guru, knowing him to be Lord Mukunda's dearest devotee. Without first remembering and worshipping the spiritual master and Lord Gauranga, one cannot render pure loving devotional service to the Divine Couple Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna. Deviation from this process will curb all spiritual advancement. If one attempts to worship Lord Caitanya separately and independently, one is unable to understand how He is non-different from Lord Krsna. When knowledge of the Lord's fundamental oneness becomes firm, however, remembrance of Lord Caitanya is inseparably interwoven into the texture of worship of Sri Krsna.

The guru is known as mukunda-prestha, or very dear to Lord Mukunda, the Supreme Lord who gives liberation from the pangs of material bondage. The devotee should think, 'Lord Krsna has sent Sri Gurudeva to deliver me', and in this way everything is perfectly harmonized upon one's realizing that the spiritual master is a loving confidante and maidservant of Srimati Radharani.

Verse 3

Translation

My dear mind, if you are eager to reside in Vrajadhama and execute devotional service on the platform of ragatmika-bhakti, as well as to yearn for direct service to Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna, then simply desire to remember and worship birth after birth the lotus feet of Sri Svarupa Damodara, Srila Rupa Gosvami, Sri Sanatana Gosvami and all the other associates of Sri Caitanya, who are the recipients of His mercy.

Sri Bhajana-darpana

The question may be raised whether it is possible to attain ragaimika-bhakti and reside in Vraja-dhama if one has taken diksa and received instruction from a disciplic succession other than the Gaudiya samapradaya. The execution as well as the goals of devotional service are divided into three categories: sadhana-bhakti, or dutiful devotional service executed according to specific rules and regulations; bhava-bhakti, or rendering spontaneous service, which is superior to regulative devotional service; and prema-bhakti, or spontaneous and unalloyed love.

Srila Rupa Gosvami says in Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu 1.4.15-16:

"In the beginning one must have a preliminary desire for self realization, for this will elevate him to the stage of attempting to associate with saints who are spiritually advanced. He then becomes initiated by an elevated spiritual master, and it is under the tutelage of the guru that he actually begins the process of devotional service. For it is only by executing devotional service under the guidance of such a spiritual master that one becomes freed of all material attachments, attains steadiness in self realization, and thus acquires a real taste for hearing about the Absolute Personality of Godhead, Lord Sri Krsna, a taste that leads one forward to attachment for Krsna consciousness. This matures into bhava, the preliminary stage of krsna-prema or transcendental love of God, the highest perfectional stage of spiritual life."

Sadhana-bhakti

Sadhana-bhakti has two divisions: vaidhi-bhakti, or regulated devotional service, and raganuga-bhakti, or spontaneous devotional service.

Srila Rupa Gosvami describes vaidhi-sadhana-bhakti in the following manner [Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu]:

"When the inclination toward sadhana-bhakti is inspired by scriptural injunctions and not by spontaneous attraction, it is called vaidhi-bhakti. Such rules and regulations are stringent and are executed in a mood of awe and reverence and

opulence. This stage is therefore sometimes called ma?yada-vada, or the path of reverence, by spiritual authorities.

Rupa Gosvami describes raganuga-bhakti thus [Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu 1.2.270-272]:

"The loving devotional sentiments that are perfectly manifested in the eternal residents of transcendental Vraja are known as ragatmika-bhakti, or raganuga-bhakti. To discuss raganugabhakti, it is necessary to analyze ragamiika-bhakti first. Natural and intense loving absorption in and an unquenchable thirst for contact with the most worshipable object, Lord Sri Krsna, is called raga. Devotional service embellished by raga is called ragatmika-bhakti, which is of two kinds: kamarupa (amorous) and sambandha-rupa (relational).

"In order to become eligible for raganuga-bhakti one must develop intense greed (lobha) to follow in the footsteps of an eternal associate of the Supreme Lord who is a permanent resident of Vraja-dhama, and is one hundred percent steeped in the mood of ragatmika-bhakti. It is from such a pure devotee that one obtains the ragatmika mood. The symptoms of one who has developed lobha is that he is spontaneously attracted to the loving sentiments and the character of eternal associates of the Lord, like Nanda Maharaja and Mother Yasoda, after hearing about them from revealed scriptures such as the Bhagavatam. Situated in this loving mood, he does not care at all for the rules and regulations of the scriptures. Yet as long as attraction, or rati has not blossomed within his heart, the devotee remains on the platform of vaidhi bhakti, which is marked by adherence to scriptural injunctions and favorable stipulations."

All devotees perform vaidhi-bhakti

While actually residing in Vraja, one must become absorbed in remembering and meditating on the pastimes of Lord Sri Krsna and those of His confidential associates whose devotional sentiments one desires to emulate. By so doing, he becomes attached to the same devotional taste. He should develop an attachment to constant hearing about these pastimes. Sadhakas who hanker after decorating their basic devotional mood with the spiritual sentiments of their favorite

associates of the Lord have to render service to Sri Krsna by following in their footsteps. As a sadhaka he renders service in his material body, and as a siddha, or perfected soul, he renders service in a suitable spiritual form. Well known among knowledgeable persons is that in vaidhibhakti, devotional activities like hearing and chanting are always being performed by devotees, and are important functions in raganuga-bhakti as well.

Bhava-bhakti or rati

Beyond sadhana-bhakti lies bhava-bhakti, or rati, loving attraction. In his Ujjvala-nilamani, Srila Rupa Gosvami describes rati as 'a complete and mature spiritual state that may ripen even further into mahabhava'. Thus rati is eagerly sought after by the very best of the liberated and perfected devotees of the Lord. When rati steadies, the first stirrings of prema, spiritual love, capture the devotee's heart. Variegated in nature, prema, or steady attraction (rau) are analyzed according to their many transformations: sneha, mana, pranaya, raga, anuraga, bhava, and mahabhava. The development of devotional sentiment from rati to prema is compared to sugarcane juice. As it is cooked, it gradually thickens into molasses, then syrup, then sugar, and ultimately into crystallized sugar candy. Similarly, in pure spiritual love there are progressive transformations, each of which learned saints term a different stage of prema. Lord Sri Krsna reciprocates with each of these loving sentiments in sublime pleasure and love.

The essence of spiritual mellows

The esoteric conclusion here is that loving conjugal exchanges in Vraja-dhama are the very essence of all spiritual mellows, and if this spiritual current is at all present in other spiritual stages, it is there only in restricted degrees. Lord Caitanya's advice is, therefore, to accept great devotees like Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami, Srila Rupa Gosvami and other unalloyed devotees, who are the recipients of the Lord's special mercy, as one's very own instructing spiritual masters, or siksa-gurus.

It should be remembered that loving devotion in the mood of ragatmika-bhakti is rarely attained, if at all, then only after many lifetimes of rendering devotional service. However if one receives the causeless mercy of the Lord and His pure devotees, ragatmika-bhakti is achieved very quickly.

Verse 4

Translation

My dear mind, you must categorically relinquish all frivolous and mundane talk, which is like a prostitute who steals all your intelligence and resolve. The desire for liberation is equally evil, for it is like a terrifying tiger, devouring your very being. I further request that you even abandon your attachment to Lord Narayana, the husband of Mother Laksmi, the goddess of fortune, who offers the grand benediction of residence in Vaikuntha. I simply and humbly request that you live in Vraja and worship Sri Radha and Sri Krsna, for They bless Their devotees with engagement in Their devotional service.

Sri Bhajana-darpana

Like prostitutes, mundane subjects plunder a man's knowledge and his resolve. A prostitute cunningly relieves her customers of their riches, and mundane talks rob a man of his wealth of knowledge. After all, one's predilection for spiritual upliftment is his only treasure, and such a treasure is everything to the sincere transcendentalist. Grossly materialistic subject matters and dealings with topics unrelated to the Absolute Truth plunder this treasure because they are unreal, illusory, and temporary.

The real price of pure devotional service

Dabbling in scriptural injunctions that deal only with temporary and mundane goals, such as greed for wealth, close association with women, or keeping the company of people overtly attached to women, are considered gross materialistic activities. Any desire for association with such activities is tantamount to mundane talk.

Srila Ramananda Raya, in commenting on the heart's proclivity, says [quoted in Srila Rupa Goswami's Padyavali:

"Pure devotional service in Krsna consciousness cannot be had by pious activity in hundreds and thousands of lifetimes. It can be obtained, however, by paying one price only: intense greed to obtain it. If it is available somewhere, anywhere, one must purchase it without delay."

Impersonal liberation rejected

Mukti, or liberation, means impersonal brahman liberation, or merging into the brahmajyotieffulgence of the Supreme Lord. Also known as sayujya-mukti, it essentially abrogates the soul's individual identity and existence. And so, even attempts to establish the reality of brahman&by this process result only in confusing verbiage. The truth of the matter is that the omnipotent Supreme Personality of Godhead is the one and only unsurpassable absolute principle.

The Supreme Lord's potencies are eternal. The supra-mundane eternal potency which acts as His internal spiritual energy manifests His transcendental pastimes, and as His external material energy, or maya it produces both the unlimited cosmic universes and the gross and subtle material bodies of the conditioned living entities. His marginal energy expands as the countless souls in the creation.

All the Lord's potencies are therefore eternally engaged in rendering service to Him. The atheists, those inimical to the Lord or who have no faith in His transcendental pastimes, pretend to create a utopia by the self-destructive process of merging into brahman, the impersonal feature of the Supreme Godhead. Such a course resembles the prisoner who attempts to end his suffering by committing suicide. One must meticulously avoid associating with people who are devoted to this kind of liberation, and reject all activities and knowledge pertaining to it.

Srila Rupa Gosvami comments on this subject in Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu [1.2.2223]:

*bhukti-mukti- spriha yavat pishaci hridi vartate tavad bhakti-sukhasyatra
katham abhyudayo bhavet*

sri-krsna-Earanambhoja- seva-nirvrta-Eetasam esam moksaya bhaktanam na kadacit sprha bhavet" As long as the fierce desire for sense gratification and liberation persistently haunt one's heart, how can the taste for devotional service ever blossom in it? An impure heart is the last place for pure devotion to take refuge in and thrive. Pure devotees, in fact, engaged in rendering loving service to the lotus feet of Sri Krsna always experience overflowing happiness and bliss, and therefore they never even think of liberation."

Liberation in devotional service

Vaikuntha in the spiritual sky is the abode of Lord Narayana, where He is worshipped reverentially with great pomp. By worship and service one can attain His abode through any one of four kinds of liberation: samipya (close association with the Lord), sarsthi (having the same opulence as the Lord), salokya (living on the same planet as the Lord), and sarupya (obtaining the same form and features as the Lord).

Srila Rupa Gosvami elaborates on this subject in Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu (1.2.5556]:

"We mentioned earlier that all five types of liberation, samipya, sarsthi, salokya, sarupya, and sayujya (or becoming one with the Lord) should be rejected. It is, however, worthwhile to mention that except for sayujya, liberation is not entirely detrimental to bhakti, or devotional service to the Personality of Godhead. One hears how souls in any of the four conditions of liberation are actually blessed with devotion to Lord Krsna.

The liberated condition is of two sorts: one is dominated by a desire for happiness and opulence, the other is motivated by selfless loving service. Saintly devotees consider the former to be antipathetic to pure devotion, and thus unalloyed devotees, engaged in unwavering service to the Supreme Lord and thirsty to relish the nectar of sublime loving mellows, do not care for any of the forms of liberation. Among unalloyed bhaktas, those whose hearts have been

captivated by the lotus feet of the son of Maharaja Nanda, Krsna, are indeed more elevated than others. They are in fact not attracted by the divine opulence of Lord Narayana, the Lord of Vaikuntha, or even by the grandeur of Sri Krsna, the husband of Queen Rukinini, in Dvaraka. Although there is no difference in principle between Lord Narayana and Lord Krsna, Sri Krsna is superior because He alone is the supreme reservoir of all ecstatic spiritual mellows. The highest transcendental exchanges find their full expression in the form of Sri Krsna."

In Sri Rupa Gosvami's Padyavali we find reference to this topic when Srila Haridasa Thakura says(Padyavali 102]:

"There is no need to talk about attaining the heavenly planets or about becoming the Lord of the universe. I do not even want to hear the Vedic hymns that glorify liberation. My mind is enchanted by that brilliant bluish flash, whose complexion

is similar to the color of a tamala sapling, who is always found in the forest groves on the banks of the River Yamuna."

Spontaneous attraction to Radha-Krsna

The Soul of souls is Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna. The spirit soul is the eternal servant of Their Lordships, and as such, he is the infinitesimal part and parcel of the Supreme Lord. His natural inclination, therefore, is spontaneous attraction for the Divine Couple. Although this attraction is the spirit soul's intrinsic birthright, and to intensify it is the true path of religious perfection, it nevertheless becomes covered over by ignorance and materialistic desires concomitant with its conditioned state.

Srila Isvara Puri comments [as quoted in Padyavali 35-36]:

"Those fortunate pure souls dwelling in the secluded forests of the Himalayas may have their hearts overflowing with unparalleled joy from complete absorption in the Supersoul; but as far as I am concerned, I only desire to see within my heart the frolics of a cowherd boy whose complexion is more brilliant than a flash of blue sapphire, who embodies the love of the gopis and who sports

in Vrndavana with nary a care.

“Let the poets continue to rave about poetry, and let the Vedic scholars incessantly praise the nectar derived from brahman realization. I myself will take shelter of a beautiful youth who is decorated with a garland made of wildflowers, holding a flute to His blossoming lips.”

Srila Kaviratna adds (quoted in Padyavali 38):

"My mind is uninterested in becoming an emperor, unattracted the opulence and luxury of Indra, unconcerned about obtaining the mystic powers of a yogi, and not at all eager to attain liberation. What does arrest my entire being is that transcendental person who roams the banks of the Yamuna River. He looks, even at a glance, like an incandescent flash of lightning, whose complexion is like a fresh monsoon rain cloud. He is always embraced by the gopis, whose arms twine around Him like creepers."

Madhavendra Puri states further [quoted in Padyavali]:

"One who is expert in flirting and coquetry, whose trailing cape is as restless as the wind, whose cheeks catch the reflection from flashing fish-shaped earrings, and who is always eager to perform the rasa dance with the young damsels of Vrndavana. Let that Supreme Personality, who is a cowherd boy, be permanently seated on the throne of my heart."

Only by worship and service to Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna in Vraja is that most brilliant gem of inherent spontaneous spiritual attraction again invoked within one's heart, thus elevating the spirit soul to the stage of the highest ecstasy of love of Godhead.

Verse 5

Translation

My dear mind, in this material life you are attacked by lust, which is like a gang of thugs that waylay innocent pilgrims, strangling you with strong terrible ropes in the form of distress, pain, and futile endeavors. In this condition you must cry out piteously and invoke the mercy of the unalloyed devotees of Sri Krsna, the

killer of the demon Bakasura. They will surely protect you from this dilemma.

Sri Bhajana-darpana

Lust, anger, greed, illusion, arrogance, and envy are the six thugs which openly harass the living entity. As if in conspiracy, they attack the innocent jiva travelling through the different stages of life.

In the Bhagavad-gita [2.62-63] it is said:

While contemplating the objects of the senses, a person develops attachment for them, and from such attachment lust develops, and from lust anger arises. From anger, complete delusion arises, and from delusion bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, intelligence is lost, and when intelligence is lost one falls down again into the material pool."

Lust, anger, cheating etc. conquered by Krsna

In this way, the thugs strangle the jiva with the ropes of pain, futile endeavors, and distressing situations that arise from previous unwanted activities. The demon Baka embodied the evil quality of deceit, and Lord Sri Krsna ripped him apart. The Lord's unalloyed devotees always guard the path of loving devotional service against pretenders and cheaters.

Scriptural confirmations

Srila Ramanujacarya has said in this regard:

"I offer my respectful obeisances to the great unalloyed devotees of the Lord like Prahlada, Narada, Parasara, Pundarika, Vyasadeva, Ambarisa Maharaja, Sukadeva Gosvami, Saunaka Rsi, Bhismadeva, Rukmangada, Uddhava, Bibhisana and Arjuna' etc."

Sri Sarvajna Acarya says: "O Lord, how extraordinary are Your devotees! They

consider the~agtocecnto~ no more than a puddle, the sun a mere firefly, the towering Sumeru Mountain just a clod of dirt, a powerful emperor a mere slave, priceless touchstone gems just so many useless stones, wish-fulfilling trees as twigs, this whole material existence like an insignificant bunch of straw. What more is there to say? They think of their own bodies as heavy burdens."

Srila Madhava Sarasvati comments:

"Empiricists and logicians, whose minds have been contaminated by speculative theories and the false pride of erudition, cannot understand God. They have no taste for spiritual topics like Krsna's pastimes. Indeed, Vedic scholars don't even have much information about the Lord. They do not know Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, just as a highly ornamental serving spoon cannot relish the delicacies it serves."

Association with devotees cleans the heart

It is stated in Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu, 2.2.291:

"Hiranyakasipu said to Prahlada: 'My dear son, association is very influential upon people. Like a crystal takes on the qualities of the one with whom it associates, for this reason intelligent persons should seek the company of high class and like-minded individuals in order to increase the prestige of their families.'"

The purport of this verse is that one's heart and consciousness cannot be purified of material contamination merely by performing sacrifices or by yoga exercises. It is only by association with unalloyed Vaisnava devotees of the Lord, ever free from conceit, that these impurities of the heart may be totally eradicated.

Verse 6

Translation

My dear mind, you have embraced the path of self realization, yet you foolishly think that you are cleansing yourself by bathing in the pretentiously fierce

qualities of deceit and fault-finding, which are compared to impure donkey urine. Factually, you are incinerating yourself and dragging an infinitesimal spirit soul like me into the conflagration. Stop this suicidal course! Dive into the immortal ocean of sublime ambrosia that awaits you in loving devotional service at the lotus feet of Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna. Resuscitate my very being and thus give both of us endless happiness.

This verse gives advice to those who have been able to subdue lust and anger, but have failed to vanquish the great enemy of deceit. The sadhaka, or spiritual practitioner, is of three kinds:

svanistha, devoted to self-realization; parinisthita, dedicated to rules and regulations; and nirapeksa, detached. The svanistha sadhaka completely rejects all the principles of varnasrama dharma and endeavors solely to satisfy the Supreme Lord Hari. The parinisthita-sadhaka organizes his life and activities to conform to the rules of devotional service and Deity worship. These two sadhakas are usually householders. The third type of aspiring devotee, the nirapeksa-sadhaka, or the detached devotee, is a renunciate and celibate. All three would do well to renounce deceitfulness, because deceit and pretense devastate spiritual understanding.

How devotees become deceitful

The svanistha-sadhaka becomes deceitful when he indulges in sense gratification in the name of satisfying the Supreme Lord. Instead of serving the pure-hearted devotees of the Lord, he serves rich and influential materialists and busies himself in accumulation of wealth beyond his needs. With the excuse of educating himself he develops attachment to speculation and logic. Putting on the robes of a renunciate, he strives for worldly acclaim and honor.

The parinisthita-sadhaka becomes deceitful when he makes an external show of strict adherence and dedication to spiritual life but inwardly is attracted to material subjects completely unrelated to Krsna, and prefers the association of the worldly-minded to saintly souls.

When the renunciate, or nirapeksa-sadhaka, becomes deceitful he considers himself to be a very elevated devotee, and exploits the renunciate's dress and status, looking down upon other devotees as if they were inferior. He collects objects and wealth far in excess of the basic requirements for a life of renunciation, and associates with women in the name of spiritual practice or

preaching. He leaves the shelter of the temple to collect funds and donations only to remain in close contact with materialists. He is always in anxiety about collecting funds, yet covers his deceit with a show of devotion. He is overly attached to the dress, position, and the rules and regulations of the renounced order, and thus neglects the main purpose of spiritual life, which is to develop attachment for Krsna.

These traits like deceit, fault-finding, speculation, argumentation, etc., are very detrimental to true spiritual realization and have therefore been compared in this verse to the ass. Fools may think that they can bathe in ass urine and become cleansed, but factually it only pollutes their spiritual lives.

The nectar of the lotus feet of the Divine Couple

Srimati Radharani is the internal energy of the Supreme Lord Sri Krsna, and Sri Krsna is the Supreme Energetic. One must submerge himself in the ocean of nectar flowing from the lotus feet of the Divine Couple. To help one invoke Their sublime mercy, Srila Rupa Gosvami prays [Stava-mala]:

“O Queen of Vrndavana, 0 Radharani, Your complexion is like molten gold, Your doe-like eyes are captivatingly restless, a million full and brilliant moons wane before Your lustrous countenance, and a blue sky, having stolen the hue of a fresh rain-laden cloud, has enwrapped Your exquisite form. 0 Radha, You are the crest-jewel of all the dallying damsels of Vrndavana, fragrant and pristine like a budding jasmine flower. Your sublime form is adorned with priceless jewelry, and you are the best of all the charming and intelligent gopis. You are decorated with all wonderful excellences and surrounded by eight dedicated and beloved cowherd girls known as the asta-sakhis.

"The ambrosia of Your beautiful lips, red as the bimba fruit, is life-giving syrup to Krsna. 0 Radha, I am rolling on the banks of the Yamuna, my poor heart filled with anticipation, praying to You with all humility. I am guilty of being an offender, a rascal, a useless wretch, yet I beg You to kindly engage me in even the smallest service to Your lotus feet. 0 most merciful Lady, it will not become You to ignore this most distressed soul, for Your heart is always overflowing with compassion and love."

Elsewhere in Stava-mala, Sri Rupa Gosvami writes:

"I will now sing the glories of the holy names of the Divine Couple Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna in eight verses. The first describes the glories of the holy names of Sri- Sri Radha and Krsna. Radharani is the daughter of Sri Vrsabhanu, and Krsna is the son of the King of Vraja. Of all the gopis, She is the most beloved of Govinda, and He is Srimati Radhika's paramour. She is the heroine of all the forest bowers, and He is the all-attractive hero. She is the brightest gem amongst the young village belles of Vraja, and He is the best of all the young cowherd boys. She is the princess of Vrndavana, and He is the dashing prince-regent. She is always enjoyed by Krsna, and He is the heart-throb of Srimati Radharani."

Humility: the cure for deceit

'In this way, O mind, your heart must become saturated with the divine nectar of the holy names of Sri-Sri Radha and Krsna, and remembering Their eternal pastimes you must wander about in Vrndavana.' As soon as the mind allows any nonessential thoughts to enter, deceit immediately attacks the soul again. The heart that has been thus purified by humility can never again open its doors to deceit.

Verse 7

Translation

My dear brother mind, the despicable desire for material honor and distinction is compared to a shameless and low-born prostitute who eats dog meat — yet she is flagrantly dancing in my heart. How, then, can the pristine love of pure devotion to Sri Kṛṣṇa ever find a place in my heart? You will simply have to serve the unalloyed devotees of the Lord, who are His intimate associates and stalwart supporters. They alone can drive out this prostitute and enthrone pure love of Godhead within my heart.

Sri Bhajana-darpana

This verse indicates how one can extinguish any remaining doubt he may have if his repeated and exhaustive attempts to weed out deceit from his heart have failed. Hankering for honor is in fact a shameless prostitute who yearns to be worshipped. All other unwanted desires may be eradicated, but the hankering for honor and distinction is extremely difficult to uproot. It is like a seed which sprouts only later into a deceitful plant, a matrix from which all the other anarthas stem. Thus it is called shameless, for it conveniently overlooks its own evil influence. Fame is like a dog, and one who runs after it is factually eating the flesh of a dog; thus the desire for material honor and distinction is compared to a low class prostitute who consumes dog meat.

Material desire leads to craving honor

If the *svanistha-sadhaka* mentioned in the previous verse still harbors some material desire in his heart, his yearning for honor manifests itself in the hope of being regarded as a highly religious person, as a generous person, or even as a sinless devotee. The *parinisthita-sadhaka* desires acclaim as a great devotee of the Lord, or acclaim as a devotee with clear spiritual understanding, or as one who is completely detached from all materiality. The *nirapeksa-sadhaka*, or renunciate, thinks that his honor lies in being considered pure and renounced, as having understood all the esoteric conclusions of the scriptures, or as having mastered the science of devotion. However, one is actually able to root out such deceptions only in proportion to his having eradicated any desire for honor and distinction. If one cannot purge his heart of deceit, there is no question of ever

attaining unalloyed love of God as it is understood by the Lord's pure devotees.

Srila Rupa Gosvami writes in Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu [1.4.1]:

"When bhava or rati deepens and matures and as a result the sadhaka's heart softens and melts completely which is to say, when he becomes spontaneously attracted to any object that has even the slightest relation to his beloved Sri Krsna only then, sastras declare, has he attained love of God, prema."

Service to the pure devotees

The Supreme Lord's beloved devotees are by nature unalloyed servitors, and their spiritual status is incomparable. They are the generals in Krsna's army of devotees, and divine rays from the Lord's pleasure-giving potency, or hladini-sakti, illuminate their hearts. This potency, moreover, is easily transferred to other hearts, where it vanquishes all contaminations and generates transcendental love of Godhead. The pure Vaisnava devotees embrace the dust of their lotus feet, their food remnants, and their sacred instructions, for these all have the transcendental potency of impregnating one's heart with the divine hladini-sakti.

Siva tells his wife Parvati [in a verse from the Padma Purana quoted by Srila Rupa Goswami in his Laghu~bhagavatamrta 2.4]:

"Of all the different kinds of worship, worship of the Supreme Lord Visnu is the highest. But even greater than this is the worship of His pure devotees."

This is confirmed in the Srimad-Bhagavatam [3.7.19], where it is said:

"By serving the feet of the spiritual master, one is enabled to develop transcendental ecstasy in the service of the Personality of Godhead, who is unchangeable, the invincible enemy of the Madhu demon, and whose service enables one to vanquish material desires"

All aspects of service apply to worship of devotees

Srila Rupa Gosvami makes the further comment in Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu:

"All the different aspects of devotional service to the Supreme lord which have been discussed in Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu also relate to serving the Vaisnavas. This is the opinion of the pan. He describes a pure devotee thus [Bhakti-rasamrta- sindhu]:

"After having beheld an indescribably wonderful personality drenched in tears of ecstasy, his body erupting with goosebumps, wailing falteringly, falling down at every step, his heart floating in waves of divine bliss, his whole being trembling like an autumn leaf, I become dumbfounded at his devotion and have lost all interest in family life or material activities."

Verse 8

Translation

O MIND, PLEASE RESIDE IN VRAJA and earnestly worship Lord Krsna, the lifter of Govardhana Hill, fervently praying to Him with utter humility to please Him. Surely He will shower His causeless mercy upon a despicably deceitful soul like me, cleansing my heart of all dishonesty and pretense. Surely He will bless me with the wonderful nectar of prema, divine love of God, and inspire me to engage in serving the lotus feet of Srimati Radharani.

Sri Bhajana-darpana

Association with saintly persons is so powerful that it eradicates even the most abominable impurities from one's heart and elevates the spirit soul to the level of complete perfection. Unfortunately, such saintly association is not always available, and thus the following instructions are given to us in this verse.

Humbly pray to Radha-Krsna to overcome deceit

A humble plea indicates a mood of sincere surrender and devotion, particularly when the devotee feels that he is the most wretched person with out any shelter to protect him.

Srila Rupa Gosvami writes in his Sri Gandharva-samprathana-astakam:

“O Radharani! You and Lord Krsna are constantly relishing Your ambrosial amorous pastimes in the groves of Vrndavana like the intoxicated king of elephants sporting with his queen elephants. Please be compassionate upon this soul, and thus being pleased, allow me to behold Your two lotus-like faces.

"Alas, Sri Radha, O Gandharvika! Wretched and miserable, I throw myself to the ground like a stick and implore You with a choking voice to hear my plea that You kindly be pleased with me and consider me as one of Your maidservants.

"O Srimati Radharani! Your beloved Syamasundara, Krsna, is much more charming than lord Narayana. His beauty enchants the entire creation. You are always present on His left, embraced by His arm, and Your exquisite beauty far surpasses the beauty of Laksmi-devi. Oh, when will I be able to see this Divine Couple and serve Them with all my heart?

"O my worshipable mistress, Radharani! I yearn to become Your maid-in-attendance and to dress Your transcendental form in a blue sari and to remove the ankle bells from Your lotus feet, and in this way to dress You appropriately for Your nocturnal rendezvous with Your beloved Krsna, the beautiful young son of Nanda Maharaja. I want to send You off to Your lover's tryst in the amorous groves where Your paramour awaits. O Radha, when will this wonderful opportunity be available to me?

"O Srimati Radhika! You and Lord Krsna are the finest adornment within all creation. In groves of love You lie on a bed of flowers and exchange dalliances of love. Oh, when will I be blessed to serve You and Your beloved's lotus feet?

"O Queen of Vrndavana! When will I be able to fan You with a camara? When You and Your beloved Krsna come to relax under the tree on the banks of

Radha-kunda after becoming fatigued from Your amorous pastimes, pearls of perspiration decorate Your bodies. I wish to find You in this condition and soothe away Your weariness.

"O beautiful-eyed Radha! Sometimes You hide in a well-concealed spot within the forest groves, but Krsna somehow comes to know Your exact hiding place and naturally catches You. You suddenly suspect me of revealing Your place of concealment and begin to question me. I begin to stutter, 'It wasn't me! Citralekha tattled on You. So please do not frown and chastise me so!' Oh, when will I be able to speak entreating words like these to You in the presence of Sri Krsna?

"When you defeat Krsna in a playful bouts of words You laughingly boast about Your victory to your girlfriends, Your sakhis. They appreciate Your victory very much and cheer You

_on with 'Jaya Radhe! Jaya Radhe!' Oh, When shall I become fortunate enough to participate in Your victory chorus?

"Anyone who reads this prayer with faith and love, glorifying the superexcellent character of Srimati Radharani, the daughter of King Vrsabhanu, will surely attract Srimati Radharani and lord Krsna to appear before him in person, being very much pleased with him."

The cure for all pretentiousness

Whereas the pure soul is inherently simple and honest, deceit is the living entity's overriding contamination. As soon as the jiva comes in contact with ignorance and nescience he becomes dishonest, arrogant, and yearns for worship and status, seeking deceitful ways and ever endeavoring in transient material activities. He thus distances himself from his original spiritual consciousness, or Krsna consciousness. But if that same unfortunate soul realizes that his true position is to feel himself humbler than even the straw in the street, and therefore develops the intelligence to respect others according to their positions,

simultaneously taking complete shelter of the holy names of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, then surely he will receive the mercy of Lord Sri Krsna and concomitantly the grace of all the saintly personalities.

Devotional service in conjugal love

Srila Rupa Gosvami describes conjugal srngara-rasa in the following way:

“The fifth mellow, namely conjugal love, is the crown jewel of all spiritual mellows. First comes deep loving attraction for Krsna, which is known as madhura-rati. When this attraction intermingles with the four ecstatic feelings of vibhava, anubhava, sattvika and vyabhicari, one can then actually taste the conjugal mellow.”

For example, in the mellows of servitorship, friendship, and parenthood, a deep and steady attraction known as sthayi-bhava mingles with the four ecstatic feelings and produces rasa, or mellow. In the conjugal mellow, lord Krsna and Srimati Radharani are the alambana principle, or the support, and Their qualities are uddipana, or stimulants to the madhura-rasa. While participating in their pastimes, the gopts and sometimes even Lord Krsna Himself manifest the eight varieties of ecstatic symptoms known as the asta-sattvika-vikaras and the thirty-three devotional sentiments known as vyabhicari-bhavas. Thus these churn the ocean of rasa.

Development of rasa

When sadhana-bhakti, or devotional service in the stage of practice, matures into bhava-bhakti, or spontaneous devotional service, it is automatically transformed into sthayi-bhava, or permanent spiritual sentiment. Later, when it intermingles with the four ecstasies of vibhava, anubhava, sattvika, and vyabhicari, rasa is produced and bhava-bhakti is transformed

into prema bhakti, or devotional service in pure love of Godhead. This is sometimes called bhakti-rasa. All of Krsna's pastimes in Vrndavana, particularly His activities with the gopis, are perfect examples of this rasa. Unalloyed devotees who are fortunate enough to be elevated to the platform of prema-bhakti-rasa first become assistants to the gopis and intensely implore Srimati Radharani to bestow Her causeless mercy. Then, a ray of hladini-sakti, Radharani's own potency, enters their hearts and the buds of prema-rasa, or loving mellows, begin to blossom. No other process for attaining prema-rasa is effective.

Paramananda, the highest happiness

By means of jnana the living entity may sometimes experience brahmananda, or the bliss of brahman realization, and thus become situated in self-realization. But without the mercy of Radharani he can never experience paramananda, or the highest spiritual happiness. For this the jiva has to pray very sincerely and humbly to attain the devotional sentiments of a resident of Vraja and become intensely greedy for such ecstasy. He then takes shelter of the sakhis, or girlfriends of Radharani, or of their assistants, the manjaris. By serving them he gradually increases his eligibility of becoming ever more intimately connected with the Supreme Personality of Godhead Sri-Sri Radha-Krsna, and thereby his chances of rendering further direct and confidential service increase.

Obtaining the mercy of the gopis

One obtains this special grace of Srimati Radharani by receiving the mercy of Her girlfriends, and as the mercy increases, the hladini-sakti matures, eventually engaging the spirit soul in the Divine Couple's personal ecstatic service, bestowing sublime spiritual joy upon him. It is very important to note that as long as the jiva considers himself as male, he is barred from participating in such intimate devotional mellows. This realm is far beyond any bodily conception, for in the primeval spiritual state the soul receives a female form for participating in this rare mellow that has absolutely nothing in common with mundane forms,

male or female. If one tries to interpolate the mundane onto the spiritual, the ensuing result is spiritual suicide, disastrous for real transcendental life.

Verse 9

Translation

MY DEAR MIND, always remain absorbed in Lord Krsna, the glowing moon of Vrndavana, for He is the most beloved of my worshipable mistress Srimati Radharani, the Queen of Vraja. Absorb yourself, dear mind, in Srimati Lalita-devi, for she is a matchless gopi and a bosom friend of my mistress, the Queen of Vraja. Absorb yourself, my dear mind, in Srimati Visakha-devi, for she is my instructing spiritual preceptor; in Radha-kunda, Radhika's favorite pond; and in Sri Govardhana Hill, for they all increase my loving attraction to the Divine Couple and Their sublime pastimes.

Sri Bhajana-darpana

Srila Rupa Gosvami writes in his Stava-mala:

“I worship that youthful cowherd boy whose complexion resembles the hue of flesh monsoon rain clouds, whose ears are decorated with fragrant campaka blossoms, whose gently smiling face defies the beauty of a lotus in full bloom, who wears a dhoti the color of molten gold, whose crown is decorated by a peacock feather, and who is the mainstay of all the three worlds. May that son of Maharaja Nanda, Krsna, always protect me. His face is more charmingly iridescent than the full moon in autumn He is the ecstatic ocean of divine pastimes. His exquisite hand holds a ball for playing boyish games, and He is the very life and soul of the damsels of Vraja. His entire body is covered with the fine dust raised by the hooves of calves, and He carries a flute tucked into the dhoti tied around His waist His mellifluous voice captivates all the cows.

"O my Lord, O friend of the poor, a swallow never tires of the glories of the billowing black clouds, whether they send showers of rain or hurl bolts of

lightning at him. Similarly, whether You are kind or harsh to me, in this world You are my only shelter. I have no other means. O slayer of the snake-demon,

Agha, my stony heart is devoid of devotion and grows despondent upon hearing about the arduous process of self-realization and the devotional discipline undertaken by great souls like Sukadeva Gosvami and Ambarisa Maharaja. I feel hopeless and incapable, but looking around me once more I see the waves of mercy that You showered upon lord Brahma and upon even the most fallen reprobates. This gives me renewed hope and soothes my troubled heart."

Prayers to Srimati Radharani and Lalita-devi

Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami says in Vilapa-kusuma-anjali:

"The Queen of Vraja is my mistress. O Lady mistress, O Radha, I am Your maidservant, but the flames of intense separation are incinerating my heart and I grow feeble from profuse crying. Finding no other means, I am therefore sitting somewhere in Govardhana and composing these verses in deep lamentation.

"O dallying damsel of Vraja, Sri Radhika, I am sucked into an ocean of grief and my condition is so miserable! Kindly send me Your mercy in the form of an infallible boat and save me from this whirlpool. Please give me sanctuary at Your lotus feet"

Srila Rupa Gosvami writes:

"I offer my obeisances to Srimati Lalita-devi, who is always engaged in serving the Divine Couple Sri-Sri Radha and Mukunda. She dries up the perspiration that dampens Their lotus feet. She is intoxicated with the highest intimate mellows, and she is the enchanting repository of qualities like exquisite grace, silent gravity, and simple directness of speech.

"I offer my obeisances to Srimati Lalita-devi, whose beautiful face puts to shame the brilliance of the full moon, whose doe-like eyes are ever restless, and who has acquired the rare distinction of being expert in dressing Radharani. She is the reservoir of all good feminine qualities.

"I offer my obeisances to Srimati Lalita-devi, whose ecstatic dancing is a pleasure to the eyes, whose exquisite form is covered by a shimmering silk dress, and whose blouse resembles the color of a peacock. Her golden complexion overshadows even the rising sun, and she is adorned with innumerable spiritual qualities.

"I offer my obeisances to Srimati Lalita-devi, who is a treasure-house of all excellences, who instructs Srimati Radhika by saying, 'O unchaste Radha! Do not be so generous and soft with that cunning son of Nanda Maharaja. Such timidity befits the mood of a conservative gopi, daksina-bhavi. You should be nonchalant, like the liberal gopi, bamyā-bhavi and thus please Him. Please hear my words, for they are for Your benefit'

"I offer my obeisances to Srimati Lalita-devi, who is an unlimited ocean of all good qualities, who when hearing even the slightest crafty word from Kṛṣṇa to Radhika is immediately angry, cutting Him off with sarcastic words that make even Kṛṣṇa lose face: 'Qh, You are so truthful! Just a nice, simple-hearted and chaste lover!'

"Srimati Lalita-devi is a reservoir of divine qualities, on whom mother Yasoda showers her parental love. She is the preceptor for all the girlfriends, sakhis, & of Radharani, teaching them all about sisterly affection. Her life and soul is Kṛṣṇa, the younger brother of Balarama, and she is junior also to Srimati Radhika. May Lalita-devi give me the opportunity to worship her.

"I offer my obeisances to Srimati Lalita-devi, who is the embodiment of all sublime qualities, who when she approaches every young maiden upon seeing her in the vicinity of Vṛndavana, and finds out after some clever interrogation that she is inclined toward her mistress Radhika, immediately fulfills her desires and satisfies her completely.

"I offer my obeisances to Srimati Lalita-devi, who is most expert in arranging secret trysts between Radha and Gopinatha, so that the Divine Couple may engage in pleasurable pastimes. She is not interested in any other festival, for she is the chief among all the intimate sakhis of Gokula"

Glorification of Yamuna-devi (Visakha-devi)

Srila Baladeva Vidyabhusana writes:

"Lord Visnu immerses Himself daily in the waters of the Yamuna with great pleasure and affection, knowing that Yamuna is the liquid form of Srimati Visakha- devi. I offer prayers to Yamuna-devi, the daughter of the sun-god, Surya."

Baladeva says that since Srimati Visakha is Yamuna-devi, by glorifying one the other is automatically, worshipped.

Srila Rupa Gosvami has composed eight verses glorifying the River Yamuna, known as Sri Yamuna-astakam [from Stava-mala]:

"Yamuna-devi is the daughter of Surya-deva the sun-god, and the sister of Yamaraja. the lord of death. Merely by touching her one can rescue himself from the nether regions of doom, and simply seeing her exonerates the greatest sinner from endless sinful reactions. Her delightful dancing waves and swift current captivate everyone 's heart. May that Yamuna-devi always purify me.

"Yamuna-devi is encircling lord Indra's huge forest of Khandava with her charming refreshing waters. Smiling. white lotuses decorate her winding course, and sweet birds like wag-tails dance gaily in them. What to speak of those who bathe in her crystalline waters, even the biggest reprobates who simply think of bathing in the Yamuna are released from all their sins. May that Yamuna-devi, Suryadeva's daughter, always continue to purify me.

"Yamuna-devi is so merciful that anyone who sprinkles but a single drop of her water on himself is pardoned from the most heinous crime. She increases the flow of spontaneous love for Sri Krsna within one's heart, benedicting those who simply desire to reside on her banks. May that daughter of the sun-god be always there to purify my heart.

"Yamuna-devi is so powerful that she flows through the seven oceans surrounding earth's seven gigantic islands, linking them yet never merging into the oceans like other rivers. She is an intimate witness to all of Krsna's 'wonderful activities, and her shimmering beauty outshines and humbles the

dazzling aura of a precious blue sapphire. May that Yamuna-devi, daughter of the sun-god, always cleanse my consciousness.

"Yamuna-devi is crowned by the transcendental land of Mathura, Vrndavana, inspiring spontaneous devotion and attraction for Krsna in the hearts of the Vaisnavas who bathe in her waters. May that Yamuna-devi, the daughter of the sun-god, always purify me.

"Yamuna-devi's charm is further increased by the lowing of the surabhi cows that graze on her beautiful banks. The kadamba trees lining her shores intoxicate and exhilarate her with their heady perfume, and she experiences her greatest ecstasy when Krsna's devotees assemble on her banks. May that Yamuna-devi, daughter of the sun-god, always purify me.

"Hundreds and thousands of elegant white swans glide along Yamuna-devi's waters, their shrill cries echoing on her curved shores, charging the atmosphere with great festivity. Yamunadevi is lovingly worshipped by demigods, Gandharvas, and humans steeped in devotion to lord Hari. Anyone who is touched by her gentle breezes is released from the cycle of birth and death. May that daughter of Surya, Yamuna-devi, forever purify me.

"Yamuna-devi distributes transcendental knowledge about the sacred pastimes of the Supreme lord Krsna and His eternal consort Radhika through all the three worlds as she flows over them. Whoever sings of her glories, be he the worst sinner, is immediately exonerated from all sins. She has become fragrant by the sandal paste and vermilion from Krsna's body melting in her waters when the Supreme lord performs His water sports. May that divine lady, Yamuna-devi, forever keep my heart free from all contamination."

The glories of Sri Radha-kunda

Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami has composed a wonderful prayer glorifying Sri Radha-kunda [from Vilapa-kusuma-anjali]:

"O Radha-kunda, pond of sublime joy, my mistress Srimati Radhika is always absorbed in divine amorous pastimes with her beloved paramour Sri Krsna on

your banks, and you have endeared yourself to this Divine Couple more than anything else They cherish. Please, therefore, be merciful upon me and allow me but a moment's vision of the object of my greatest adoration, Srimati Radharani."

In the same hymn, Srila Raghunatha Gosvami offers this nice prayer to Srimati Visakha-devi[Vilapa~kusuma-anjali]:

"O Visakha-devi, O beautiful damsel of ever flowering charm, my mistress Radhika and you are of the same age, therefore you have become Her confidante. She does not leave your side for a single moment. I am enfeebled by the arrows of separation from my beloved mistress Radha, so kindly arrange for me to have but a glimpse of Her and in this way help sustain my life."

Prayers to Govardhana Hill

In his prayer to Govardhana Hill, Srila Raghunatha expresses his fervent desire to reside near the sacred mountain [Govardhana-nivasa-astakam]:

"O Giriraja-Govardhana, when Srimati Radharani spoke the following words with Her lotus lips, 'My dear friends, this mountain is the best among all the devotees of

Hari', by the verdict of all the Vedas and other scriptures you attained the unsurpassable position of becoming the Hlaka mark on the forehead of Vrajadhama. I pray that you therefore allow me shelter near you."

Verse 10

Translation

MY DEAR MIND, just worship Srimati Radharani, for She has overshadowed Rati the wife of Cupid, Gauri the wife of Siva, and Lila the personal energy of Lord Narayana with Her exquisite beauty. Her good fortune has made Her more resplendent than Indrani the wife of King Indra, Laksmi the eternal consort of Lord Narayana, and even Satyabhama, Queen of Dvaraka and wife of Krsna. She has cast a spell on Lord Krsna and brought Him under Her control, thereby

preventing all other competitors, including Candravali, from even coming near Him. She is the moot beloved of the Lord's girlfriends.

Sri Bhajana-darpana

One cannot attain the lotus feet of the Supreme lord Sri Krsna. who is the energetic principle and the source of all energies. without first approaching His internal potency.

Description of Srimati Radharani

In this connection, Srila Rupa Gosvami writes [Ujjvala-nilamani]:

“The principal characteristics of Srimati Radharani, the Queen of Vrndavana, are that She is charming, ever-youthful, has roving eyes, an ever-sparkling smile, a body marked with all auspicious lines, Her fragrance drives Krsna mad with desire, She is an exponent of fine music, has sharp intelligence, is dextrous, shy, respectable, patient, grave, playful, eager to display the highest ecstasy of maha-bhava_Z that She is the primary source of supreme spiritual love, the most famous, the object of attraction for Her elders, that She is controlled by the love of Her girlfriends, the principal of Krsna's many loves, and She has Him always under Her control.”

Srimati Radharani's glories

Scripture provides a plethora of descriptions of Srimati Radharani. in the Gopalottara-tapani: "She is the embodiment of maha-bhava, or the highest transcendental ecstasy, and none of the other gopis, or cowherd damsels of Vrindavana, possesses Her excellent qualities. Radharani is therefore known as the most famous Gandharva."

The Rk-parisistha says:

"Srimati Radharani is always to be found with Sri Krsna, and Madhava [Krsna] is always to be seen with Radhika. One is never without the other's company."

Narada Muni describes Srimati Radharani in the Padma Purana in this way:

"As much as Srimati Radhika is dear to Lord Krsna, Her pond Radha-kunda is as beloved to Him. Among all the gopis Srimati Radharani is most dear to Krsna."

Rupa Gosvami's prayers to Radharani

In his Catu-puspanjali [Stava-mala], Srila Rupa Gosvami says:

"O Queen of Vrndavana, Sri Radha, I worship You. Your fair complexion is mote resplendent than molten gold, the color of Your sari the hue of a blue lotus flower. Your beautiful braided hair is long and raven-black, its coiffure studded with many brilliant gems, like the shining black hood of a cobra.

"Even the beautiful lotus in full bloom or the rising full moon offers no comparison to Your breathtaking face, for it is much more exquisite. Your shining forehead is marked by a tidy saffron tilaka.

"The arches of Your elegant eyebrows put to shame Cupid's bow. Your cascading black tresses sway, and the dark mascara on Your roving eyes makes them look like restless black partridges.

"Your fine nose is decorated by a ring studded with the noblest pearl, and Your lips are more charming than bright red tulips. Your sparkling even teeth are like rows of spotlessly white jasmine buds.

"The golden earrings that dangle gracefully from Your ears like a pair of Laburnum flowers are inlaid with many precious gems. The gentle cleft of Your delicate chin is decorated with a dot of musk, and an intricately bejewelled necklace sparkles on You with regal splendor.

"Your nicely formed arms are like lotus stems, adorned with fine and precious gems, and the two armlets inlaid with blue sapphires softly jingle with Your slightest movements, pleasing all ears with their sweet music.

"Your hands are beautiful and soft like the lotus, and Your fingers are decorated with rings mounted with precious jewels. Your breasts are adorned with a large necklace finely set with stones and gems.

"The central jewel of Your regal necklace sits atop a line of dark gems that grow gradually larger in size. One could mistake it for a black snake carrying a gem on its hood. You are slender around the waist, and Your belly is concave because it must carry the burden of Your full breasts. It is marked by three lines like entwining creepers.

"A tinkling girdle of gold inset with precious stones adorns Your broad flaring hips, and Your shapely thighs put to shame the pride of the golden trunks of banana trees.

"Your kneecaps are so delicate and well-formed that they are far more attractive than round golden caskets studded with gems. The ankle-bells on Your finely formed feet sing an eternal melody, and the pink lotuses that blossom in autumn bow their heads in ardent worship to the beauty of Your lotus feet.

"The brilliance of millions upon millions of full moons pales before the opalescent nails of Your lotus feet. Innumerable ecstatic symptoms are Your natural embellishments, and You become stunned and perspire freely when Your yearning sidelong looks from afar intimately traverse Krsna's body. Uncontrollable erotic waves overcome You, and when You meet with Your beloved Krsna You are swept away in a surge of sublime ecstasy. O Queen of Vrndavana, You are the reservoir of all divine qualities, and I therefore worship Your lotus feet.

"O Srimati Radharani, all the symptoms of the very highest ecstasy, mahabhava, become simultaneously manifest in You, and Your heart is benumbed. You are the ocean of unlimited transcendental emotions found only in perfect heroines, and everyone is amazed when You exhibit these ecstatic emotions.

"All the charming and captivating traits which make a heroine perfect are offering their obeisances to Your lotus feet in silent praise. The great beauty Laksmi-devi, the goddess of fortune, is humbly praying to attain residence on the

toenails of Your lotus feet.

"You are the crest jewel of the damsels of Vraja, an eternal resident of Gokula, the most beloved object of the gopis. Your gentle smile acts as the life sustaining salve for Lalita and other sakhis.

"When Your roving eyes glance on Krsna with a sidelong look, it acts on Him like a drop of ambrosia, maddening and inciting Him with love. You are the apple of Your father king Vrsabhanu's eyes, and the soothing rays of Your moon like activities exhilarate him.

"Your heart is like an ocean which is overflowing with waves of compassion. Therefore, O Radhika! shower Your mercy, and be pleased with this person who is begging to become Your maidservant.

"O Radha my mistress! When will I be fortunate to see that after a lover's quarrel, when Krsna tries to pacify You, His indignant lady-love, with sweet cajoling words, in which He is truly expert, and begs You for a lovers' tryst, You are really pleased within but nonetheless turn Your face away and look at Krsna from the corner of Your eyes.

"O Divine Lady! Will that day ever come? When Lord Krsna, who is adept at everything, strings a charming garland of myrtle blossoms and slips it over. Your head and His electric touch sends waves of ecstasy pulsating through You and You begin to perspire profusely, when will I be fortunate enough to gently fan You with a palm leaf fan?

"O Divine Lady! O beautiful Queen! When after Your hours of pleasure with Krsna Your intricately made-up hair becomes disheveled and You need someone to set it properly again, when will You instruct this maidservant to do this service?

"O Divine beauty with cherry lips! Will I be able to see the wonderful dalliances between You and Krsna? When I place betel-nut pan into Your lotus mouth, Krsna tries to take it out of Your mouth and chew the same pan.

"O Srimati Radha! Among all the beloved gopis of Krsna You are His most cherished jewel. Therefore kindly be pleased with me and quickly shower Your

mercy by including me amongst Your family members.

"O Queen of Vraja! I beg repeatedly at Your lotus feet for Your compassionate grace. Please allow me to become Your maid-in-attendance (sakhi) and confidante, so that when You become indignant after a lover's quarrel Krsna will approach me, knowing that I am Your sakhi, and flatter me to take Him to You; then I will take His hand and guide Him to You.

"Anyone who reads this prayer, named Catu-puspanjali, dedicated to Radharani, the Queen of Vrndavana, with faith and devotion, will very soon receive Her mercy directly."

Worship of Srimati Radharani

In this manner Srimati Radharani should be worshipped with wonderful glorification, prayers and devotional service. Let us hear what Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami writes on this subject[Vilapa-kusum-anjali 101-102]:

"O Supreme Ladyship, Queen of my heart, Radha! Laksmi-devi the goddess of fortune does not possess even a drop of the beauty that exudes from Your exquisite toenails, therefore if You do not grant me the proper vision to perceive Your transcendental pastimes, then what use do I have for this life, which is burning in the fire of excruciating sorrow?

"O merciful Lady! Indeed, lately I am floating in a nectarean ocean of hope, and passing time in hardship and pain, but if You do not shower mercy upon me then this life, living in Vrndavana, and even Lord Krsna are all meaningless to me."

Meeting Radha-Krsna

If by some great fortune (the mercy of a Vaisnava or Bhaktidevi) a devotee develops attraction orrati towards the devotional mood exhibited by the eternal residents of Vraja (vraja-bhava), then he must approach a guru who is on the raganuga platform and find out his own eternal relationship with the L£rd.

He must then engage totally in devotional activities and worship, with sadhana and bhajana, the lotus feet of the eternal and original guru principle [guru-svarupa- tattva] who is amanjari (assistant of the gopis). By and by, after serving the manjari as the guru principle, when he receives her mercy, he then engages in the service of the sakhis (Srimati Radharani's confidential maidservants and girlfriends). By serving the sakhis properly it is possible to personally meet Srimati Radhika; and by Her mercy one can participate in the eternal pastimes of the Divine couple. All this is possible, to begin with, only if one possesses guileless humility, intense greed and undeviating resolve for executing devotional service.

Verse 11

Translation

O DEAR MIND, In order to receive the direct service of Srimati Radharani and Giridhari [Krsna], who are intoxicated with and attracted to amorous pastimes with each other, and of Their confidential and eternal associates, simply take shelter of Srila Rupa Gosvami, following his instructions of relishing the five types of ambrosial service to Lord Krsna according to proper standards, namely: worshipping, glorification, meditation, hearing, and offering obeisances [arcana, kirtana, dhyana, sravana, and pranama]. And simultaneously serve Govardhana Hill.

Sri Bhajana-darpana

Now Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami explains the very confidential and esoteric aspects of the science of devotional service:

- Confidential and eternal associates: Lord Krsna surrounded by His friends like Sridama, Subala, etc., and Srimati Radharani surrounded by Her girlfriends like Sri Lalita-devi and Visakha-devi.
- Attracted to amorous pastimes: become absorbed in Krsna's conjugal mellow, knowing that the other mellow-servitorship, friendship and paternal- are less attractive.

- Receiving direct service in Vraja: devotional service rendered on the stage of sadhana-bhakti is more like going through the motions; it is not direct service to the Lord. In these early stages of perfection, one serves the Lord from a distance. First the devotee serves under the guidance of the manjaris a distance, and then gradually is promoted to serve the sakhis directly. Then after perfecting her service under the tutelage of the sakhis, she receives the direct service of the Divine Couple Sri Radha and Sri Govinda.

Direct service to the Divine Couple

There are unlimited types of direct services: cleaning the groves of Sri-Sri Radha-Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, arranging Their bed, bringing water, preparing betel-nut pan, stringing garlands, etc. Countless maidservants each have a specific service in which they are totally absorbed.

Direct service is possible only when the living entity obtains his original spiritual body. Direct service on the platform of conjugal mellow floods the heart with inexplicable bliss and ever-fresh devotional sentiments due to recondite ecstatic emotions coming to the surface from within. This bliss is increasing by leaps and bounds at every moment. The devotee's heart cannot be touched by any sadness or sorrow because now his sole concern is to serve his beloved object without the slightest desire for self-aggrandizement. The mood of separation [vipralambha] experienced in the conjugal mellow, which is seemingly painful and sad is incidental; it is factually and merely a transformation of intense ecstasy. There is no way that this feeling can be equated with the sorrow a living entity experiences in the mundane plane.

- In the shelter of Srila Rupa Gosvami: the instructions and rules set by Srila Rupa Gosvami, the spiritual preceptor and authority on the science of devotional mellows or rasa, in his books like Bhakti-rasamṛta-sindhu and Ujjvala-nilamāni are meant to be sincerely followed. He writes (Bhakti-rasamṛta-sindhu 1.2.90-92):

"One must worship the Deity form of the lord with faith and devotion; relish the topics of Srimad-Bhagavatam by hearing from advanced devotees who are

knowledgeable in the science of devotional mellows; associate with like-minded Vaisnavas who are pure, more elevated and realized; chant the maha-mantra regularly and constantly; and reside in a holy dhama like Vrndavana. Earlier I enumerated these five types of devotional activities; still I mention them once again only to reiterate their importance and superiority over other devotional processes."

- **Worship the Deity:** to serve the lotus feet of the Deities by worshipping Them; to properly observe hari-basar (ekadasi, maha-dvadasi, appearance days of the Lord and other festival days), apply tilaka on the body and respect the maha- prasadam mala (garland used by the Deity); respect, by drinking the caranamrta (water or milk, etc. used to bathe the Deities), and by eating maha-prasadam anna (food offered to the Deities). Observing spiritual vows (kartika-vrata) and to worship and serve Tulasi-devi, etc., are included within Deity worship.
- **Glorification:** includes studying the scriptures, discussing Krsna-conscious topics amongst devotees, congregationally chanting the maha-mantra, and singing or talking about the transcendental qualities and pastimes of the Supreme Lord.
- **Meditation:** everything pertaining to remembering. Remembrance of the Lord and His pastimes are referred to as meditation.

Meditation or remembrance

Srila Jiva Gosvami delineates meditation or dhyana in this manner [Bhakti-sandarbhā]:

"Smaranam or remembrance means to search with the mind. One must follow the step-by-step process (remembering first the name, then the form, qualities, etc.) Then one easily advances spiritually and remembers everything pertaining to the Lord like His qualities, associates, paraphernalia and finally His pastimes.

According to Bhakti-sandarbha, smaranam or meditation is of five kinds:

"1) A little search with the mind for the lord's name, form, etc. is called smaranam.

"2) To withdraw the mind completely from the external phenomena and to slightly direct it towards and delve on the lord is called dharana.

"3) To fix the mind in thoughts of a specific form, pastime, etc. of the lord is known as dhyana.

"4) When dhyana becomes uninterrupted and gives excessive bliss it is known as dhruva-anusmrti.

"5) When only the object of deep meditation is spontaneously manifest in the totality of the mind it is called samadhi"

- Hearing: to hear about the Supreme Lord's name, form, pastimes, etc. from a pure devotee or asadhu is the process of hearing. Hearing lectures on the scriptures in class or seminar (istha-gosthi) is also a part of sravanam or hearing.
- Offering obeisances: to offer obeisances to the Deities and to offer obeisances (dandavat) to the holy places that remind one of the Supreme Lord.
- Serving Govardhana Hill: Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami has directed this instruction both to himself and to everyone else. Govardhana Hill is the devotees' most precious object of worship.

Raghunatha dasa Gosvami's worship of govardhana-sila

Lord Caitanya gave Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami a govardhana-sila. He describes this incident in the following words:

"Though I am most fallen and wretched, that divine Personality who saved me from the enticement of great riches and wife etc. by His causeless mercy, became pleased by placing me near Him, accepting me as one of His near and dear associates. Putting around my neck, so I would always have them near my heart, a garland of wild flowers, a gunja-mala and a govardhana-sila, may that

magnanimous Lord Gauranga always appear in my heart and flood it with sublime ecstasy."

The govardhana-sila is a direct manifestation of the Supreme Lord. To offer worship and obeisances to Govardhana Hill, and to think that 'Since Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami never left the vicinity of Govardhana, I also do not want to go away from here', is a sign of undeviating attachment and is the same as serving Govardhana Hill. For the sadhaka or beginner, this has two meanings:

- 1) to worship the govardhana-sila in the same manner and with same rules as the Deities, and
- 2) to stay in the holy place of Lord Krsna's pastimes, which means to stay in Vraja and meditate on the Lord. This is a different way of saying the same thing.

Srila Rupa Gosvami wrote that to reside in the holy dhama is one of the main limbs of pure devotion.

- Proper standards: proper standards and rules do not necessarily imply vidhi, or superfluous rules and regulations. Those on the platform of vaidhi-bhakti, or devotional practice ruled by regulation and strictures, will understand 'proper standards' in this way. But those elevated souls who are on the raganuga-bhakti platform will be guided by the rules of raga-bhakti as enunciated by Srila Rupa Gosvami.

Verse 12

Translation

ANYONE WHO, having taken shelter of Srila Rupa Gosvami and his direct followers and residing in Gokula (Vraja), sings sweetly these eleven verses that instruct the mind with dear understanding or the purports of these texts, will certainly obtain the priceless gem of devotional service to Sri Radha and Sri Krsna.

Sri Bhajana-darpana

The author is describing the result of reading the eleven verses which he speaks to his own mind, but are indeed applicable to the readers.

Followers: means followers of Srila Rupa Gosvami (rupanugas) who relish the same taste in devotional service as oneself, are compassionate and more advanced than oneself. Just as Lalita-devi, in spite of being the leader of her own group, is still subservient to Srimati Radharani, similarly many elevated bhagavata-uttama or highest-class Vaisnavas, who are gurus of many disciples, are followers of Srila Rupa Gosvami.

Yuthesvaris or group leaders follow Radha

Srila Rupa Gosvami writes in Ujjvala-nalamani (Hari-priyaprakaran,61]:

“Sri Lalita-devi and other sakhis are each qualified leaders of their individual groups, but still, because they are intensely greedy to increase their love for their worshipable object Srimati Radharani and to please Her_Z they simply hanker for the position and mood of being Her followers.”

- Direct followers of Srila Rupa Gosvami: the teachings of Lord Caitanya on the principles of mellows (rasa-tattva) as instructed to Srila Rupa Gosvami, the process of worship and bhajana Srila Rupa Gosvami himself followed, is called rupanuga-bhajana.
- Forest of Gokula: any secluded spot within the area of Vraja is referred to here as Gokula.

The glories of Mathura-mandala

Srila Rupa Gosvami describes the glories of Mathura in his Stava-mala [Mathura- stava]:

"Who is very adept in giving liberation in the form of devotional service at the lotus feet of Sri Govinda; who is embellished with the art of both saving the living entities and helping them cross the ocean of nescience; who shines like the crest jewel of all holy places in the entire creation, being the sacred pilgrimage where Lord Krsna enacted His early childhood pastimes; may that Mathura-dhama, who is even worshiped by Vaikuntha, spread her benedicting rays on you.

"Her effulgence is more brilliant than a million moons; she is invincible even by the tremendous onslaught of material nescience in the form of five types of distress like ignorance, etc. This means that a resident of this place is unscathed by and free from all material sufferings, and hearing the glorious results of residing in this dhama the powerful demigods are also fearful of doing anything to her denizens. Here Krsna performs His eternal pastimes continuously, which captivates the hearts of great sages like Sukadeva Gosvami, Saunaka Rsi, etc. She fulfils the desires of those who worship her. Lord Siva even desires to serve her by being her gatekeeper and guard, and Lord Varaha has sung eulogies to her. May that holy place of Mathura bless you with loving devotion to the Supreme lord.

"She is like the seed of the tree of liberation and the uprooter and destroyer of the weeds of unwanted material desires within the heart. She protects one from all inauspiciousness and ills, fulfils all desires, even to the highest stage of love of God. Here lord Krsna's twofold spiritual energies (cit-sakti), which are eternal, full of knowledge and bliss, are forever manifest. May that holiest of dhamas, Mathura, burn to ashes all sinful reactions even of the subtle body, and shower you with love of Godhead.

"O Avanti (Ujjain)! please pick up the spittoon; O Mayapuri (the magical city of Indra), you can fan with the yak-tail; O Kanchi! you hold up the umbrella; O Kasi (Benares), you keep the slippers ready; O Ayodhya (the birthplace of lord Ramacandra)! you do not have to be afraid anymore; O Dvaraka! you may stop singing your eulogies, because lord Krsna's Queen, Mathura-devi, is pleased with all of you who are her maidservants.

The glories of Vrndavana-dhama

Again in the Stava-mala [Sri Vrndavana-astakam], Srila Rupa Gosvami describes the glories of Vrndavana:

"Whose kadamba tree and other groves are crowded by the cowherd damsels, the gopis, who come running with bubbling joy on hearing the flute of Sri Krsna; who is fragrant with the gentle breeze that carries the scent of lotuses blossoming in the flowing waters of Jamun-devi, the daughter of Mount Kalindi; may that Vrndavana give me shelter.

"Vrndavana is Superior to gaining liberation in Vaikuntha, the spiritual sky, and therefore is thousands of times more auspicious. This land gives the invaluable treasure of the spiritual mellows of servitorship, friendship, parental and conjugal love. She is so influential that lord Brahma, the four-headed guru of the world, prays to be born there as a humble blade of grass and less. May that holy dhama Vrndavana become my only shelter.

"Her atmosphere is always seeped with the aroma exuding from the distant rows of trees in bloom, making even Laksmi-devi heady and amazed, and the bumblebees attracted by the excessive effusion of nectar from their blossoms are buzzing around and offering prayers to this holy dhama. May that Vrndavana-dhama give me shelter.

"Her entire body, an expansive tract of land, is decorated with the lotus feet impressions marked with signs of lightning, goad etc., of the ever-youthful divine couple Srimati Radha, whose complexion resembles the lightning flash, and Govinda, whose hue is the color of fresh monsoon clouds. She is surrounded by fresh buds and shoots which are trying to emulate the tender beauty of the nails on the low feet of the divine couple. May that holy Vrndavana give me shelter.

"Here, Nanda Maharaja's bosom friend King Vrisabhanu's daughter, Srimati Radhika-devi, has given permission to Vrndadevi to make elaborate arrangements for festivities everyone's increasing pleasure, both for the moving and non-moving living entities Here Krsna, Balarama's younger brother, the slayer of the demon Pralambhasura, plays His flute with a fine touch to attract the cowherd damsels who are expert in relishing music and the spiritual conjugal

mellows; and the place they roam about hearing the flute. May that holy dhama of Vrndavana give me shelter.

"Here the peacocks, mistaking lord Krsna for a fresh rain-laden cloud because of His complexion resembling its hue, are dancing in joy. Here the sun-god's friend King Vrisabhanu's daughter, Srimati Radharani, is proudly declaring out of great attachment and possessiveness for Her land that 'Vrndavana is mine'; and because of it, the deer, birds and other animals are pairing off and becoming jubilant. May that Vrndavana give me shelter.

"Here countless groves stand witness to adept coquetry and lover's quarrels expertly won by Srimati Radhika, who is a reservoir of all transcendental qualities. Here the dust gives testimony of the intricate dancing steps of the guru of all the amorous arts and love-strategies, Sri Krsna, by being decorated with the impressions of His lotus feet May that Vrndavana give me shelter.

"Here Giriraja Govardhana, after having attained the rarest distinction of becoming a pure devotee of the Supreme lord (hari-dasa), is eternally residing. Here is situated the extraordinary place of the super-excellent pastimes of lord Krsna that not only amazes the queens of Dvaraka, Rukmini and Satyabhama, but all the young girlfriends of Krsna, the cowherd damsels: it is the arena of the rasa dance. Here clusters of forests with fragrant flowering trees that increase the luster and nectarean charm of the ambience surround the entire area. May that Vrndavana always give me shelter."

- Instructing the mind: instructing the minds of those devotees who are sincere in pursuing a serious spiritual life of bhajana or worship.
- Priceless: the very esoteric spiritual purports of Srila Rupa Gosvami are incomparably superior, being received by him from Lord Caitanya.
- Singing sweetly: loudly and clearly in the proper meter, in the company of others or alone, these eleven verses (Sri Manah-siksa) must be sweetly sung with a mood of entreaty and overflowing love.
- Clear understanding of the purports: the recondite devotional essence ensconced in these eleven verses should be fully fathomed and then recited or sung.